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SUBJ: UNHCR IMPATIENT WITH MOZAMBIQUE'S REFUGEE PROGRAM

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Sensitive But Unclassified - Handle Accordingly

¶1. (U) Summary: On March 20 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) sponsored a two-day retreat to work with the National Institute for the Aid of Refugees (INAR), the Mozambican government office in charge of refugee issues, to establish a strategic country plan for 2007-2009. Invitees representing the donor community, local and international NGOs, and government officials gathered to discuss all relevant aspects of Mozambique's refugee program. The retreat revealed UNHCR's impatience with the GRM's stalled process of determining refugee status, and raised a number of other questions. The relatively comfortable, generous conditions at Mozambique's Maratene camp appear to be luring refugees from central and eastern Africa. The newly arrived head of UNHCR Mozambique, Victoria Akyeampong, clearly has much work to do. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The retreat began with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduardo Koloma's keynote speech addressing the major strategic objectives of the GRM's refugee program, including creating provincial offices for INAR (currently based in Maputo), seeking training programs - including immigration and law enforcement screening programs at key border posts - for all officials involved in handling refugee issues, supporting UNHCR's commitment to voluntary repatriation with a particular focus on Rwandan refugees, improving refugee identity document production, and reinforcing refugee rights with an emphasis on unaccompanied minors.

Budget Cuts

¶3. (U) For their part, the Mozambican office of UNCHR admitted to budget constraints this year (they expect to only receive 80% of last year's budget), while faced with increasing demands on services and resources. The new head of UNHCR's Mozambique office, Victoria Akyeampong, appealed to the audience to come up with innovative solutions on how more could be done with less. She said current Mozambican policy whereby refugees (even those without status) have been receiving unlimited access to services at the Maratene camp for years on end is simply untenable; she suggested a compromise in which people asking for asylum or refugee

status would be given six months of unlimited support, during which time the GRM would have to make a status determination. Depending on the determination, the refugee would be offered third-country resettlement, voluntary repatriation, or local integration.

UNHCR Unhappy Over Stalled Refugee Status Determinations

¶4. (SBU) Several times during the retreat, heated debate was followed by awkward silence. UNHCR was very critical of Mozambique's currently paralyzed refugee status determination (RSD) process, which has ground to a halt over protracted bureaucratic stipulations and a lack of personnel to carry them out. Example: not a single RSD decision was made in calendar year 2005, leaving hundreds of refugees or asylum seekers in limbo, and UNHCR along with other donors providing food and services indefinitely.

¶5. (U) INAR officials explained the RSD process in detail. INAR employs two people to conduct the initial interview when refugees arrive at the camp. Dossiers on each person are painstakingly put together by these two individuals and then sent to Maputo for review by the Eligibility Commission, an interagency task force charged with rendering an RSD decision based on the file contents. The Commission then sends the files to the Minister of Interior for approval and signature. The Commission is supposed to meet four times a year, but often does not. Additionally, last year Interior Minister Pacheco did not review a single case passed to him by the Commission, and has not yet done so this year, either.

The Lure of Mozambique and Maratene Camp

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¶6. (SBU) Other important questions emerged during the retreat, such as why are Congolese, Somalians, and Rwandans crossing up to three countries to declare refugee status here in Mozambique? Why not stay in neighboring countries? It seems that Maratene has earned a reputation for being a "five-star" camp, and the city of Nampula fertile ground for business opportunities. As if to punctuate the point, during the conference INAR chief Rosa Chissaque received a telephone call from the border post at Lichinga (Niassa province, near the border with Malawi) and announced that 18 more Congolese had just requested asylum in Mozambique. What is the justification for continuing to support refugee programs in Mozambique, given donor fatigue and in the absence of active conflict in the region? And why doesn't the GRM have a clear integration strategy?

¶7. (U) The refugee population in Mozambique, rather than dropping, has actually grown somewhat in the past year. Among the 6,100 refugees in Mozambique, there is one Afghani, one Cuban, one Bangladeshi, one Palestinian, and one Ethiopian. The clear majority are Congolese, Rwandan and Burundian, although there are also handfuls of Angolans, Liberians, and Zimbabwean.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) Victoria Akyeampong told PolOff she was sent here from Geneva three months ago to "clean things up." UNHCR's exit strategy is to phase out its presence here by 2010, as it does not see a justification for the growing refugee population. An Ivy League graduate (and U.S. legal permanent resident), Ms. Akyeampong clearly has the skills and force of personality to realize her mission. However, the issue is one of partnership, and in INAR she has an

indecisive partner hamstrung by bureaucracy.